

Building Blocks to Sustainability



Objectives

You will learn:

- ◆ To establish the parameters for operating your NN center.
- ◆ To determine which programs best integrate your resources while meeting resident needs.
- ◆ To institute training that sustains the operation of the center, strengthens the programs being offered, and moves the center to become the focal point of the community.

Key Points

- ◆ Sustainability is planned, it does not just happen.
- ◆ Managing the resources of your NN center requires you to operate it like a business. There are a number of things to consider before you begin, starting with the appropriate use of resources.
- ◆ The operation of your center is driven by the services you offer. Forming a relationship with your residents will help you to determine what is appropriate.
- ◆ To remain effective, your programs must change to meet the needs and growth of your residents, your partners, and your resources.
- ◆ Training should be a regular part of your staff development. It will provide them with the tools necessary to forecast areas of change as well as opportunities for expansion.



Program Development Materials

Overview

Purpose of Today's Session

To offer recommendations on managing sustainable efforts at your Neighborhood Networks (NN) center

In rural, urban, and suburban communities everywhere, Neighborhood Networks centers are successfully delivering programs and services that move people toward economic self-sufficiency. To accomplish this, their efforts must be strategic.

Operating a Neighborhood Networks center is like managing a business. To be successful, planners must implement sound financial management, committed and experienced staff, product development that reaches the targeted population, strategic marketing, and income generation. But while center planners should operate the Neighborhood Networks center like a business, they should always be aware that the center is there to serve people and foster community development.

Managing and sustaining a Neighborhood Networks center is not only about keeping the doors open but also about keeping your center's programs competitive by offering services uniquely tailored to your residents' and community's needs. In order to assist you in maintaining your center as a small business, this section presents a comprehensive overview of managing and sustaining a NN center while asking you to consider the following questions:

- ☐ What goes into keeping your center operational from day to day?
- ☐ How do you determine what value comes from the services you offer?
- ☐ How do you deliver services in a way that attracts and maintains your market?

To address these questions, three core components of center management will be reviewed—Operations, Services, and Training.

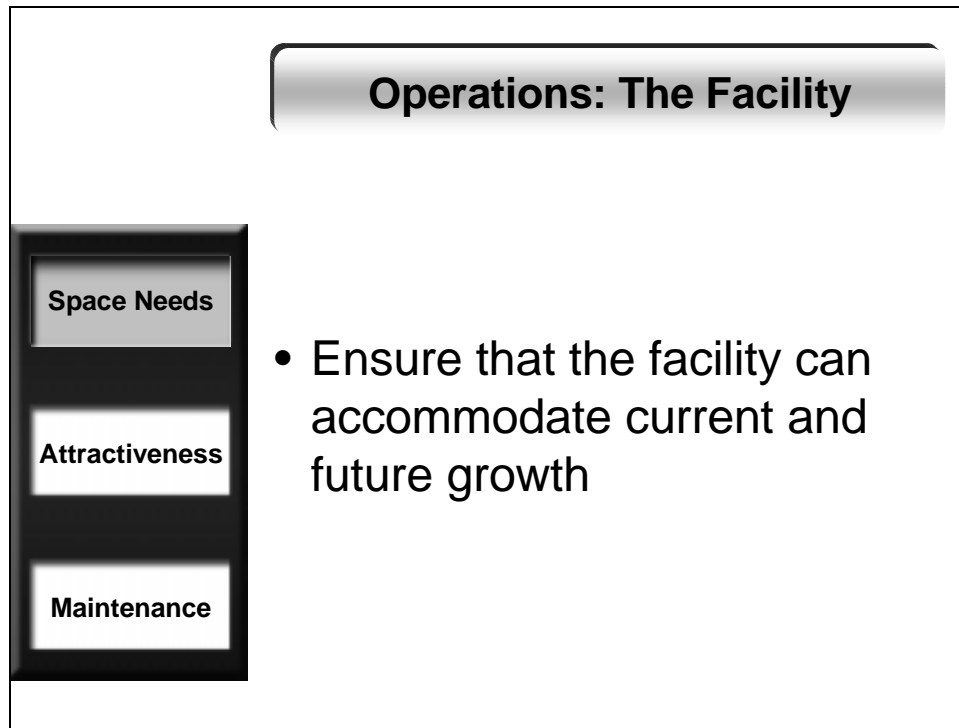
Overview

- In this session we will be looking at three core components of managing sustainability at your NN center:
 - Operations
 - Services
 - Training

Operations—Facility, Resource, and Budget Requirements

After you have conducted initial assessments, determined the needs and aspirations of participants, and designed center programs, making your Neighborhood Network center operational will involve determining the physical requirements of the space for current and future use, human and other resources such as equipment, and funding required to generate and sustain your center's activities, services, and programs.

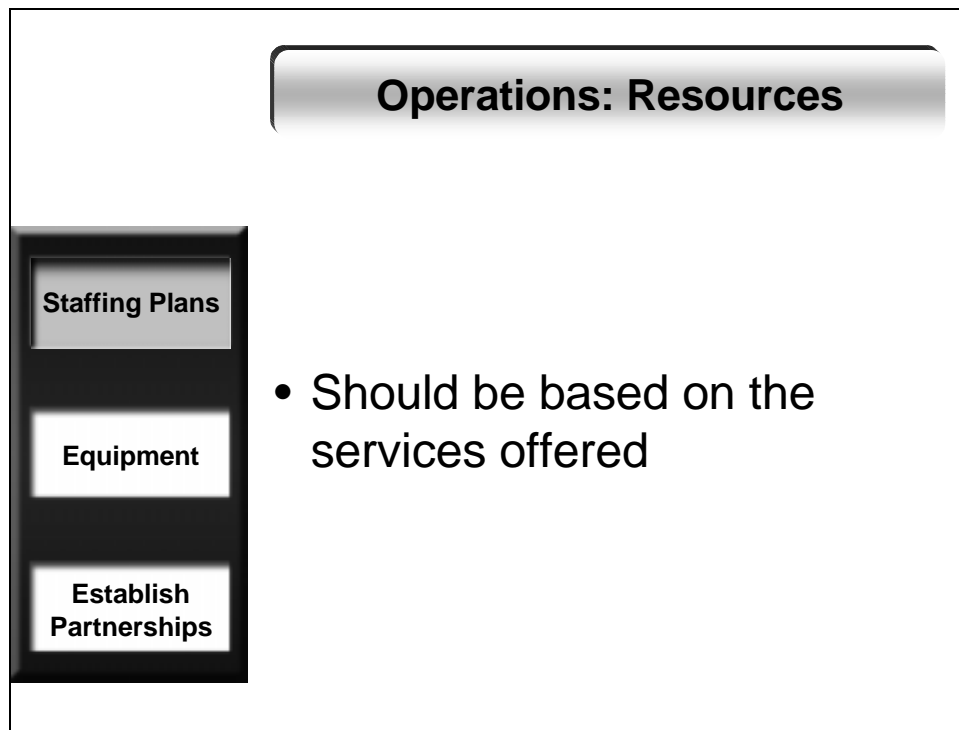
Facility



The requirements of the physical environment of your center will largely depend on the services offered. Computers, visual aids, furnishings, and other equipment or items needed for training, accessibility, and safety will make it necessary to acquire adequate space and make it secure. Sufficient space should be provided to allow residents enough room for an optimal learning experience and to connect as a community.

Adequate ventilation and moderate temperatures are important considerations when investigating locations for the center. Ideally, the facility should be located on the premises of the housing development. The facilities should also be clean, attractive, and support activities being conducted in connection with present and future program offerings. A system should be designed to ensure regular maintenance of the center.

Resources



The most valuable asset of your NN center is its human resources, including residents, staff, and volunteers. After determining the functions of your center, job descriptions can be developed and the search for qualified personnel can begin. Equipment should then be acquired that is in line with your program offerings and service objectives, including computer hardware and software as well as noncomputer items such as visual aids, textbooks, furnishings, and related items. After initial startup of your center, ongoing partnerships that have contributed to your center's success should be maintained, as you continue to explore new collaborative relationships with stakeholders in the community.

❑ Staffing

Step 1: Determine the Functions of the Center

The steering committee first lists the activities that it expects the staff of the center will perform. Determine which activities can be addressed on a full-time basis and which should be addressed on a part-time basis. Consider which activities could and should be handled by the steering committee, which activities should be handled by paid staff, and which should be handled by volunteers.

Step 2: Develop Job Descriptions

Once these functions have been determined, the steering committee can develop job descriptions for the full-time and part-time positions. A sample job description should have the following elements:

- Position description
- Duties and responsibilities
- Qualifications
- Salary and benefits
- Application deadline

Step 3: Search for Qualified People

The steering committee may establish a Search Subcommittee to recruit qualified people for paid and volunteer positions. The Search Committee could include:

- Members of the steering committee
- Volunteers or representatives from neighborhood institutions
- Residents

The search can then proceed by publishing the job descriptions in local and regional newspapers, circulating the descriptions to employment agencies and other neighborhood institutions, and posting the job descriptions at the center and other locations where they will be seen by residents.

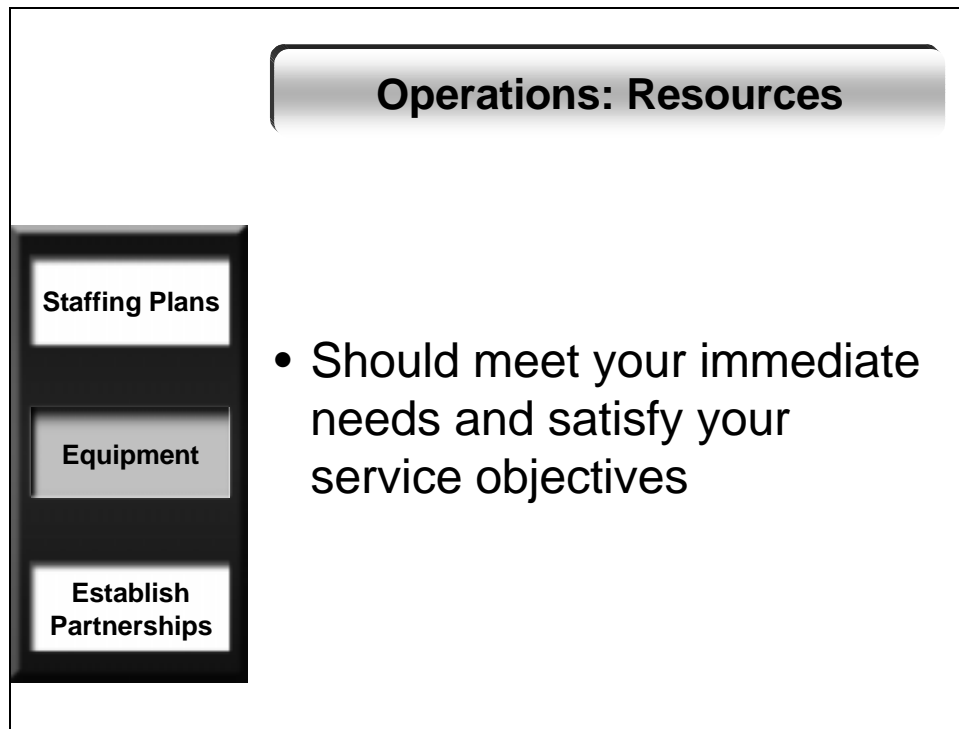
It is important to consider hiring residents for positions because resident staff members will begin to develop an even greater sense of ownership of the center. For example, resident teenagers can supervise and instruct the younger children. Teenagers who have developed a proficiency in solving technical problems can be hired as troubleshooters.

The center needs a full-time director if it is going to be open and operating during traditional business hours, that is, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The center director will likely perform the following tasks:

- **Administration**, such as hiring, firing, payroll, timekeeping, and paying bills
- **Budgeting**, including tracking income and expenses
- **Reaching out** to neighborhood institutions
- **Scheduling** the hours of the center
- **Teaching** classes, if time permits

Additional staffing needs may include personnel hired to develop programs, coordinate and train volunteers, and work closely with student teachers and teaching aides.

❑ **Equipment**



It may be a daunting task to sort through the selection of hardware and software programs on the market. A sound decision will result from a careful and thorough investigation of the options and by asking questions, doing test runs, and asking more questions. Regardless of future changes to hardware, software, and educational technology, deliberate purchase decisions today will allow the center to conduct its technology access program 5 or more years without it becoming technologically obsolete.

Computer Software—The center's software purchases should reflect its program focus. For example, a center that focuses on job preparation should have the software that local employers with job opportunities use in their businesses. However, some standard software packages are wise purchases because of their multiple applications and wide acceptance in the marketplace.

Software Focused on Specific Program Areas. The center should purchase software after the steering committee has decided on what program areas to focus. The range of software available for any program area is extensive. Consulting with experts from programs that serve the same types of people that the center hopes to serve will help guide you. Content areas may include:

- Adult literacy
- Job preparation and job placement
- Senior services
- After-school tutoring and activities
- Business development

Standard Software Programs

Generally, the following standard software programs will be needed because they are the building blocks of computer literacy and will prove invaluable in managing the day-to-day operations of the Neighborhood Networks center:

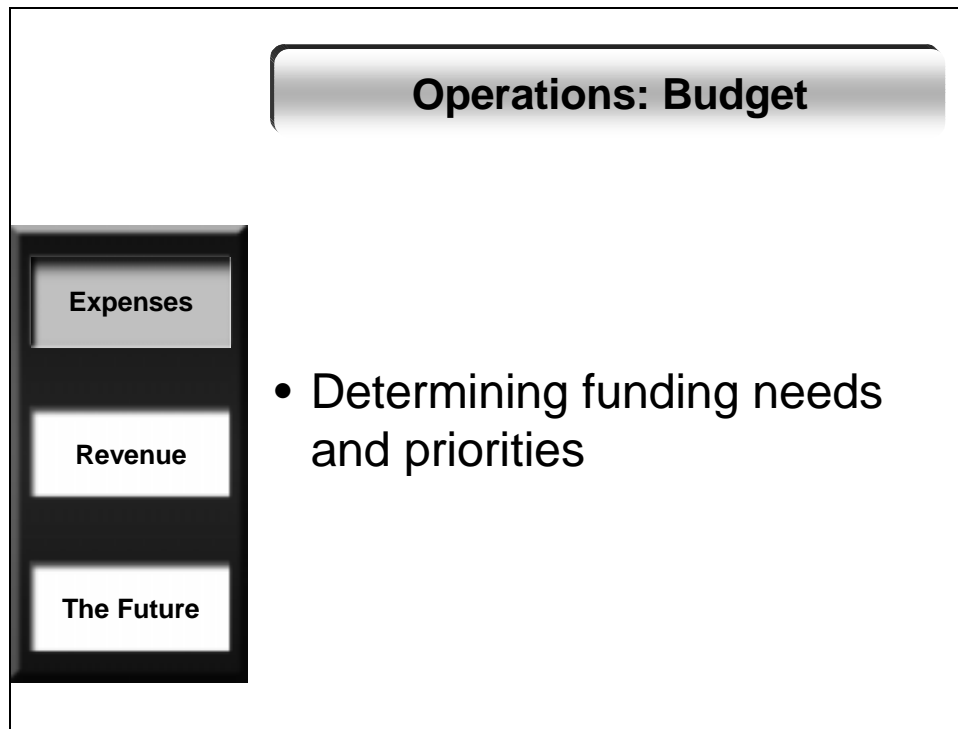
- **Word processing applications** are used to draft and print letters, reports, etc.
- **Spreadsheets** are used to create budgets and track money.
- **Databases** are used to enter, manipulate, and organize large amounts of information and print out reports.
- **Graphics applications** are used to create designs and manipulate images “imported” into other programs.
- **E-mail** programs are used to send and receive messages and files from computer to computer via the Internet.
- **Web browsers** are used to access the World Wide Web.
- **Multimedia tools including camcorders and scanners** are used to create and send documents that include videotape footage and photographs.

Computer Hardware—The term hardware refers to the system that includes the computer, monitor, printer, mouse, keyboard, floppy disk drives, and modem. With good planning and outreach efforts, it is possible to have a few computers donated to the center. They are likely to be used computers, of various makes and models. The center may also want new computers to run certain software programs to implement a program area. Whether the computers are used or new, shopping for computers requires an introduction to the vocabulary used. Consult the *Neighborhood Networks Resource Guide* for guidance on requirements for printers, monitors, hard drives, peripherals, key boards, and CD-ROM and DVD drives, as well as cost ranges for computers.

Internet and multimedia software are also essential to providing quality programs, especially those offering language instruction, software tutorials, health services to the elderly, and chat rooms and listservs for residents seeking to obtain information and connect with friends, family, and travel and educational opportunities.

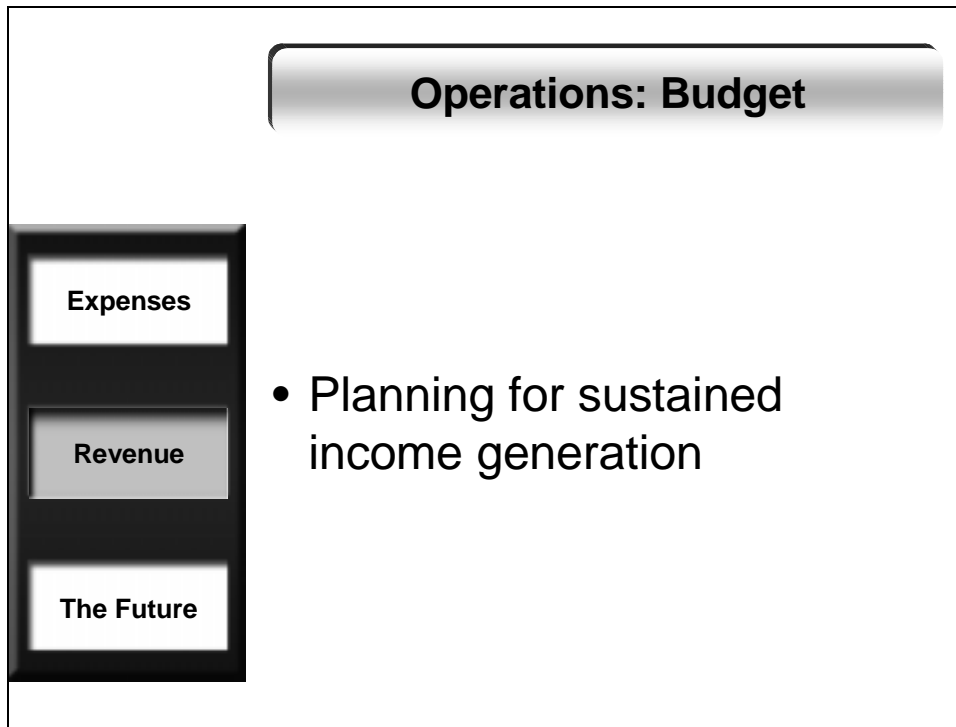
Noncomputer Equipment—The center will need furniture to make it a desirable place to be. The extent of furnishing will depend on the size of the space and the number of users. There are, however, certain necessities. Tables are needed for computers, for adults and children working together, for adults working alone, for teens doing group projects, and for staff. Desks, chairs (provide enough space for two chairs at each computer for instruction purposes and so two individuals can work together), lamps, and comfortable seating for elderly and disabled residents will also be required.

❑ **Budget**



Now that key areas such as program areas, computer hardware and software, hours of operation, and staffing requirements have been decided, it is time to determine whether your center can obtain the funding and resources for initial startup and sustainability. This process is called “budgeting.” Each new center will actually have two different budgets:

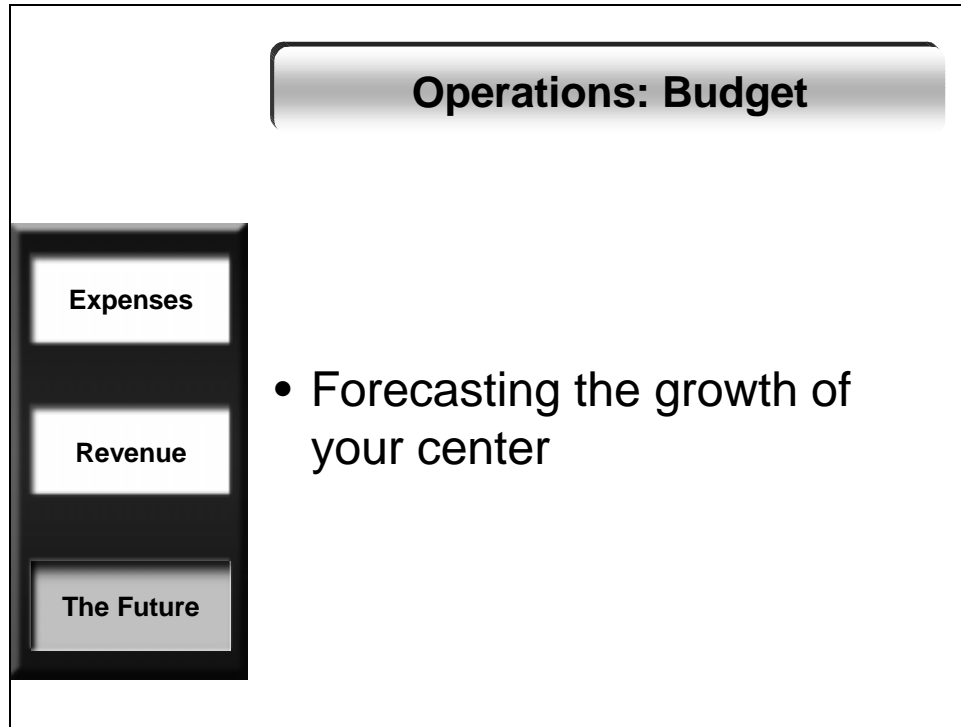
- **A startup budget** detailing the one-time costs of setting up the center and the sources of funds that will be used to cover these costs.



- **An operating budget** detailing the ongoing costs of operating the center and the likely sources of funds that will be used to meet these costs.

Maintain a detailed list of center expenses and income sources. Within each income source, identify the particular source, such as a grant from the United Way or hardware donations from a company in town. Then, identify the amount of money coming from each income source and present this information in the same line-item format.

Office Expenses	Annual Costs
Office Supplies	\$500
Copying	\$300



- **Funding for current needs and future growth** will involve becoming familiar with sources of funds and in-kind contributions from potential sources including private and corporate contributions; foundations and funding organizations such as the United Way; government funding; user fees; including revenues generated from partnerships within the community; and income generated through business development activities and fundraising events. Consult the Neighborhood Networks Resource Guide online at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org for guidance in locating potential funders and completing the application process.

Service Development

Services

Your center's programs should be tailored to the needs of the residents and other community stakeholders. They should be able to see the value of what you are offering.

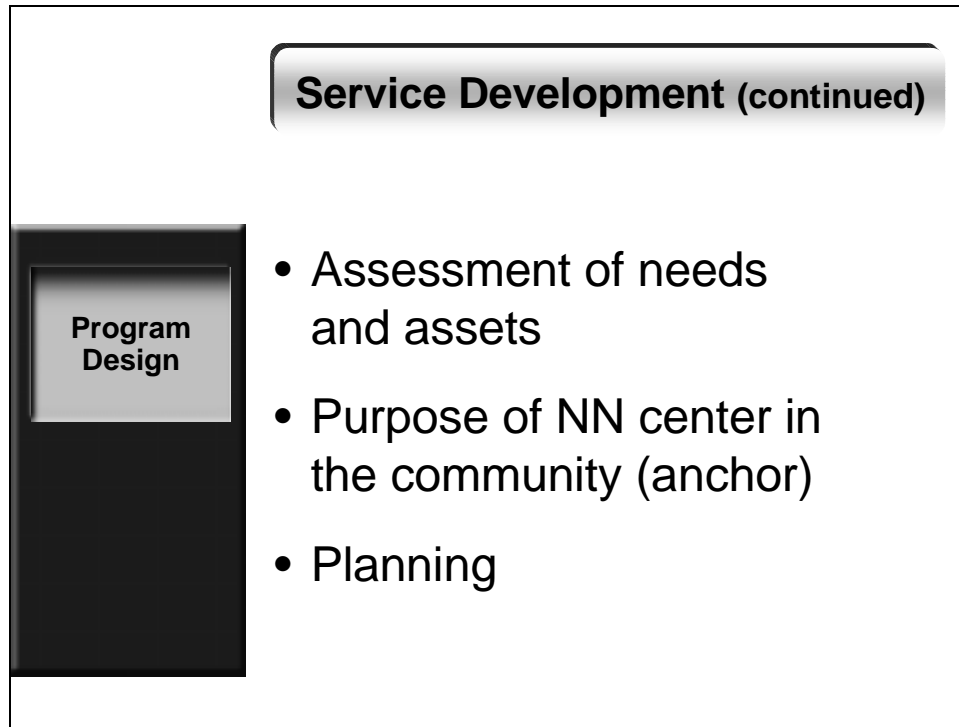
The heart of any Neighborhood Networks center is the community of stakeholders that support the center and participate in its programs and services. Planning and program design should flow from a clear understanding of your center's mission and a thorough assessment of the needs of the individuals and groups that will use its services. Continual enhancements of center offerings can be designed based on both formal evaluations by program participants as well as informal feedback sessions for community members.

The steering committee or advisory council needs to collect information from the residents about their needs and interests before it determines the programs that the center will offer. It must also maintain an awareness of the employment needs and skills in the local community and offer pathways to economic growth through training, education, and related programs. The center's ability to provide these programs will depend, in large part, upon partnerships developed by the center with groups already active in the community. Ultimately, however, the survival of the center will depend upon its ability to match the needs of the residents with community resources that can help to meet those needs.

The initial step in developing the services or programs that you offer is to assess your current operation. The million dollar question that you want to answer is, "What is your NN Center currently doing and why?" This will lead to a series of questions, such as: Did you inherit programs that are well attended? Are you operating programs that require a lot of effort? Do you have adequate resources to sustain them? Are you preparing to offer new programs based on feedback from participants? Have you assessed what services are most popular with the residents and why? Have you been watching the changes in the community and begun working with your partners to address the impact of these changes on the center, the residents, and other key stakeholders?

Once these questions have been answered, you are prepared to determine how to enhance your existing services. The enhancement requires you to conduct an assessment of resident needs, stakeholder involvement, and resources required for enhancement.

Program Enhancement



Your center's efforts to successfully channel its resources—staff and volunteers, partnerships, equipment and other material resources, and funding—after initial startup can be determined by evaluating user satisfaction, including gathering information from the wider community about the impact of your center on businesses and residents other than those using the center. You may have designed meaningful programs only to find that they were underattended or, in turn, discovered that your programs did not fully respond to the needs of your resident population. Conducting evaluations will help you pinpoint areas for improvement and long-term sustainability.

Assessing Resident Needs and Interests?

Every community or neighborhood is made up of many different groups of people. Assessing their needs and interests is a way to find out about the people that the center wants to serve so the programs developed by the center will match the people who live in the community. Information on potential center users is also an important part of the business plan.

The assessment should help the steering committee determine:

- How much space the center needs and what equipment is desirable.
- The center schedule that best accommodates residents.
- The types of classes and workshops that the center should offer.
- The types of computers and software programs and associated wiring that will be needed.
- The number and types of teachers that will be required.

Identifying Community Assets or Resources

Because property owners and HUD have limited resources for operating the center, the steering committee must look to other organizations to see if their programs or assets can be useful to the center. We refer to these as community assets or resources. These resources will be found at neighborhood institutions, both public and private. This section sets out the process for “mapping” or inventorying the community’s assets.

This inventory is the beginning of a process in which the steering committee can try to connect community resources with center needs and resources in order to build partnerships within the community. Three steps are required to begin to connect a center to specific assets within the neighborhood:

- ❑ *Step 1: Make a List or Inventory of Key Neighborhood Institutions*—To begin identifying community resources, the steering committee must make a list of neighborhood institutions, both public and private, that could be helpful in starting up and operating a center. These include colleges, schools, libraries, hospitals, religious institutions, and local businesses. The list can be developed using a combination of methods, such as basic research, Internet research, telephone calls, and in-person meetings.
- ❑ *Step 2: Make a Comprehensive List or Inventory of the Resources or Assets of Each Neighborhood Institution*—Each institution identified in Step 1 possesses resources that may be useful to a center. Step 2 requires the steering committee to examine each institution for the resources it can offer. The inventory of resources should include courses and programs, personnel, space and facilities, equipment, jobs, economic power, money, and outsourcing opportunities.
- ❑ *Step 3: Identify the Role of Potential Community Partners*—Select those neighborhood institutions that are most likely to be Neighborhood Networks center partners and specify what role these institutions would play in the center.

Types of Resources



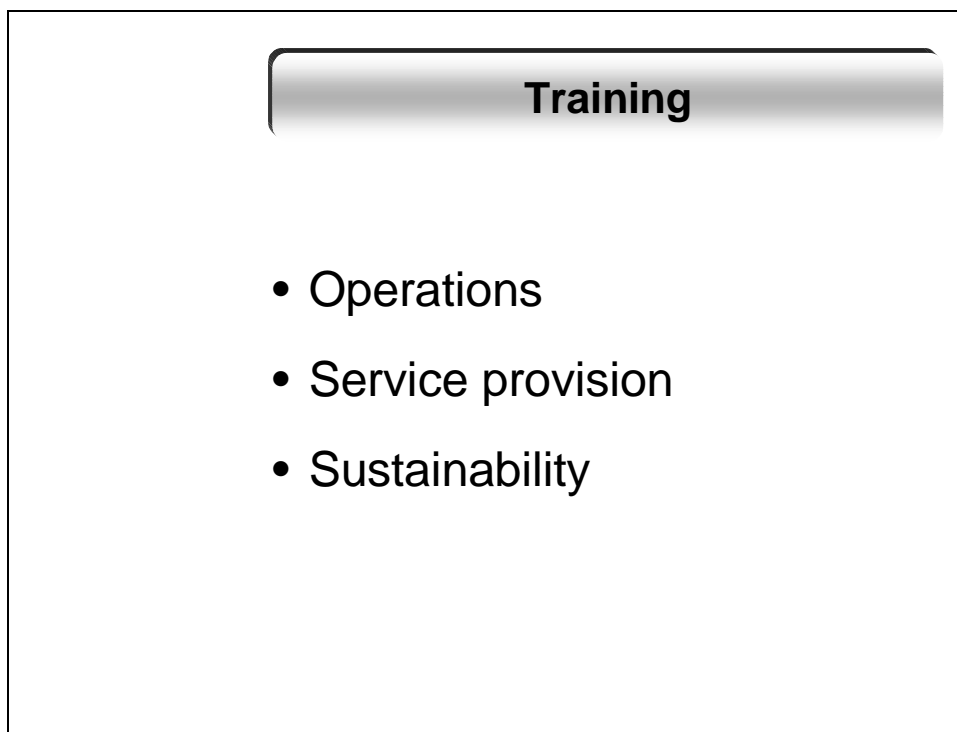
Local partners can provide many services for your residents. There are countless examples of successful partners, but here are some typical services that partners can provide to a Neighborhood Networks center:

- ☐ Volunteers can help teach classes or organize events.
- ☐ In-kind goods and services are usually free or reduced-price items from local partners. Some centers have received coupons for free groceries, dental exams, drivers, deliveries, computers, and technical support.
- ☐ Onsite programming provides residents with classes that they would normally have to go away from home to receive. Oftentimes, the best providers of programming are local colleges and universities.
- ☐ Partners can provide financial support. This is covered in the fundraising portion of this section.

Designing programs that meet resident specifications

With all the assessments completed, you can begin the process of developing programs that meet the requirements identified by the residents. The critical item is basing center activities on the appropriate pairing of resources with programs offered. By working closely with the residents to assess their needs, look at the financial impact, and establish a series of programs that incorporate each element, you are well on your way to achieving sustainable program participation.

Training



The successful operation of a NN Center requires that staff develop the capacity to juggle the financial and programmatic demands against the changing community dynamic. This is not a skill that comes naturally to most people. As such, your center budget should include resources for training on operational issues that directly impact sustainability. Training in the following area is recommended.

Operations: Considerable time has been spent discussing the operation of your NN center from the economic perspective. However, just as critical is to consider the operation of the NN center from the predictable patterns of change that will occur. These patterns we'll refer to as the "life cycles" of a Neighborhood Networks center. The center will naturally evolve from the concept of the center, through its establishment and existing operation and finally into the enhancement stage. There is a beginning, middle, and sustaining process that will continue for the life of the center. Note that there is no ending stage in the life cycle. No it was not overlooked, it is simply that the intent is for the NN center staff to receive training that will trigger a response that indicates a need for a change to sustain the center. The change could be in a program, partnership, or any other area that could impact sustainability.

Staff should be trained to look for the stages and recognize that it is time to begin, grow, or enhance program offerings. This training can be provided by a variety of volunteers such as the Senior Corp of Retired Executives (SCORE), a college student studying business, etceteras.

Service Provision: The development of services is a critical factor in successful NN Centers. To design programs that are relevant and will keep the residents actively involved requires a bit of Forecasting. This may require center staff, residents, and volunteers to become familiar with innovations in technology, including new developments in both hardware and software capabilities, educational opportunities, new employment and economic trends, health care access and technology, and other areas that may be of relevance in your community. In turn, these

factors will have a determining effect on your center's operations and budget, quality of service provision, and overall sustainability.

Sustainability: To maintain a productive and growth-oriented Neighborhood Networks center, make sure to maintain good communication with your most important resource—your residents and community—and encouraging their active **commitment** and buy-in to the center's continued development and contribution to the community. You can do this not only by applying the management techniques already discussed such as conducting ongoing assessments and evaluations, but also by training all stakeholders in the entire range of skills that are essential to keeping your center a vital institution within your community.

Summary

- Operations (planning)
- Services (forecasting)
- Training (life cycles)



Presenters Biographies

Ingrid Bullock, a consultant to Aspen Systems provides training and technical assistance on community development. Targeting low-income communities, she draws together residents, property owners/agents, local businesses, and institutions of higher education to develop strategies for addressing pressing issues by utilizing leveraged resources. Ms. Bullock has worked with some of the most economically challenged communities across the country where she has been tremendously impacted by the tenacity and determination of the residents who are working to effect a change. Ms. Bullock has 15 years experience working with HUD programs in the areas of Community Planning and Development, Fair Housing, and University Partnerships. She has been involved with the Neighborhood Networks Initiative since its inception. Ms. Bullock holds an MBA in international trade from the University of Maryland's University College.

Michelle Thomas, an Aspen Systems training developer, has more than 10 years of experience in training, program management, and community relations. Her background includes housing, college and university administration, and the military. She has created academic enrichment programs for children in public housing; developed numerous partnerships between universities and local organizations to support programs for low-income residents; managed welfare-to-work pilot partnerships between three local and state public agencies; written many procedural manuals for public housing authority departments; delivered diversity training workshops to faculty, staff, and students; created and delivered leadership development training modules to student leaders; coordinated large-scale special events and speaking engagements, including conferences, leadership development trainings, lectures, and cultural performances; managed facilities operations for the multisite division of a major university; and written and published numerous articles on public affairs issues for the Internet.